

Responsible Budget Coalition

Q: What is the Responsible Budget Coalition?

A: The Responsible Budget Coalition is a diverse group of more than 150 individuals and organizations – ranging from human-service providers and civic leaders to labor unions, faith groups, public policy advocates and beyond – that represent and serve millions of Illinois residents. We are committed to building the support needed to solve Illinois’ budget crisis, prevent harmful cuts to essential public services, save jobs, eliminate the state’s long-term structural deficit, and make taxes more fair. If you’d like more information about our principles and our efforts, please see our Web site at www.abetterillinois.com.

Q: What are the Responsible Budget Coalition’s goals?

A: The goal is a responsible budget with adequate and fair revenues as soon as possible. We use a framework best represented by the level and mix of revenues in HB174, which has passed the Senate and has the support of the Governor. We believe there is a strong majority of members of the General Assembly who understand and will act on the need for sustainable revenues. We want them to understand the looming budget deficit numbers – and the fact that new revenues are vital to sustain basic services for people.

Q: Haven’t there been initiatives like this in the past? What makes this coalition different?

A: All the groups are deeply concerned with the budget and were working hard on it in their own ways. Several of the organizations have, indeed, come together on budget matters in the past, but in different and smaller-scale iterations. However, the current fiscal crisis is far, far worse than any we’ve experienced before. An unprecedented number of organizations – almost 100, and counting – have come to the realization that the common interest – a responsible level of revenues for the state budget – dominates and should drive coordinated activity. We all stand together under the banner, “With a responsible budget, we can *all* do better.”

Q: Shouldn't we be focusing on cuts to government spending, especially during a recession – when families are struggling?

A: We can't cut our way out of a \$12 billion shortfall – the budget hole that’s forecast for the next fiscal year. The \$1 billion in cuts we've already experienced this year have caused devastation to too many children and families in Illinois. And, it's short-sighted. What we don't commit to today – good healthcare, early learning and other educational opportunities, child care and other human services for working families – will cause more harm by costing us even more in the future. We must focus on fixing the real problem: inadequate revenues. HB174 makes dramatic progress in closing the budget shortfall, and we must make progress on revenues TODAY. The longer we put off the tough decisions, the deeper the hole and the bigger the problem we leave for our children.

Q: What about reform? How can we ask taxpayers to send even more money to Springfield?

A: We can and should ensure greater accountability from the leaders we elect to make policy and budget decisions. But one thing is clear: We need both things, today: greater accountability, and more adequate revenues to stabilize vital programs. Kids, families and communities cannot wait any longer for the funding that’s necessary to maintain critical services, services that we’ve already begun to cut back, and that won’t withstand additional cuts.

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We can all do better.

Q: Aren't many lawmakers reluctant to vote for an income tax increase? How will you overcome their hesitations?

A: We know we have support from both sides of the aisle and from every part of Illinois. To build on this support, we plan to keep the dire consequences of an irresponsible budget in front of the public and the legislators. This is not an abstract policy issue; a broken state budget has a daily impact on real lives and communities. Most Illinoisans are already feeling the consequences of this broken budget more than they would feel any modest tax increase. Every Illinoisan will know someone dramatically impacted by the cuts that will need to take place if new revenue doesn't become a reality.

Q: Isn't increasing taxes bad for business in Illinois?

A: Most Illinoisans, including business people, understand the terrible climate our irresponsible budget creates. In order to return to prosperity in Illinois, we must pay our bills on time, better-prepare our future workforce, stabilize our communities that are in distress and ensure equity and balance in our system. Illinois' income tax has the lowest flat rate in the nation, and we haven't had an increase in that tax in more than 20 years. And, the income tax is the part of our state tax system that best reflects people's ability to pay.

Q: Why is HB174 a good solution?

A: HB174 is a comprehensive, balanced solution that will raise between \$5 billion and \$6 billion in desperately needed revenues in the short term, and more in a stronger economy. It will also provide meaningful tax relief for families and preserve important state priorities for children, families and communities.

Q: It looks like HB174 gets us halfway there. How you propose we fill the remainder of the state's budget shortfall? I'm reluctant to support a measure that could still leave cuts on the table.

A: We all must continue to explore ways of erasing the entire shortfall, to stave-off cuts to vital programs and to restore Illinois to stability. It's taken years to get into this crisis, and it will take time to get us out of it. As the economy strengthens, so too will the revenue generated from a tax increase. One thing is certain: doing nothing is no longer an option. HB174 provides the framework for a sustainable revenue solution that will continue to provide the services families need and allow Illinois to pay its bills on time.

Q: What will happen if Illinois doesn't increase its revenues?

A: We know that as bad as things are today, if legislators fail again to act responsibly and raise adequate revenue, the next fiscal year will be far worse: a budget shortfall of approximately \$12 billion in FY11. There is no solution without new revenue. So we plan to continue building both the coalition and the public will.

Q: You've convinced me! How do I support a responsible budget?

A: We'd love to have you join us. First, we're asking all House members to become co-sponsors of HB174. We're also providing every legislator with a pledge form to join the Responsible Budget Coalition. Please join today.

We can all do better.